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ABSTRACT

Ecology is the relationship between persons and their environment. A caring ecological relationship is dynamic, able to be affected by the internal environment of the person and by the people/animal/plant/object external environmental surround in which a person lives. This paper attempts to examine the nature of ecology and how to facilitate the development of a caring ecological relationship between children and their child caregivers. Claiming that a caring ecological relationship is not based on cognition alone but is based, as well, on affect or emotion, the paper discusses the role and importance of attachment, separation, and individuating as well as the integration of the above three elements. The paper concludes that early and continued attachment relationships affect the development of an ethic of care and must precede any effort at teaching. Contains 22 references. (MOK)

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Ecological Caring: A Developmental Perspective on the Person/Environment Relationship

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Ecology is the relationship between a person and her environment. As with all relationships, the ecological relationship is one that involves an integration of both cognition and affect, or the thinking and feeling states, of a person. It occurs to me that some of us---maybe many of us---entertain an erroneous assumption: that a caring relationship between a person and the environment is solely a cognitive issue and that it could, therefore, be taught whenever we think it appropriate to insert it into a curriculum, either at home or at school, without a lot of thought as to what came before our intervention in a learner's life.

I think this assumption is erroneous because I do <u>not</u> think that environmental caring is <u>solely</u> a cognitive issue. Nor do I think that it can be taught; or, more specifically, that the teaching of environmental caring will "take" <u>unless</u> certain kinds of life experience precede the teaching. So the puzzle for me in recent months became: How did those of us who care about the environment ourselves develop to our current level of caring (however advanced it might be)? How do children become caring? Can we facilitate the development of caring children---the development of <u>care-full</u> children---of children who are and

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continue to develop as people "full of care" rather than as <u>care-less</u> people, people "without care" for their environment be it people, animal, plant, or natural or human-made object?

To move toward answering this question, there are some ideas which we need to consider about relationships: In addition to the conviction that relationships involve both cognition and affect, I would like to mention two more: that relationships develop over time, and that relationships, as they develop, are affected by known and unknown, changing elements in the person as well as in the environment. I would like to focus on these three aspects of relationships, applying each to the ecological relationship, the relationship between a person and her environment.

<u>A caring ecological relationship is not based on cognition alone, but is based, as well, on affect or emotion</u>.

Our goal in facilitating the development of a caring ecological relationship is double edged: the first edge is <u>cognition</u>. We want a person to understand the complexity of environment, to understand the necessity and the process of attending to environment in a caring manner, to understand the mutual dependency between person and environment. Understanding may motivate a person to do what is right, but, it may never become a motivator for caring.

The second edge of the double-edged relationship between a person and environment is <u>affect</u>. We want a person to feel for his/her environment, to care, to be care-full, care-giving, rather than care-less. This second edge is not likely to develop through

an approach which emphasizes the first edge, understanding; environmental caring is not likely to develop through an objective factual or even a problem-solving approach.

Environmental cognition and environmental concern, understanding and caring, may be co-constructed and co-dependent, but that concern cannot be assumed to follow cognition automatically: caring cannot be assumed to follow understanding. **A caring ecological relationship develops over time and begins very early in a person's life.**

If a system develops, a history is assumed---a beginning or precursor. When does caring take root and begin to grow in a self-system? When considering environmental caring, it might be easy to assume that it is developed primarily in school, perhaps elementary school, but surely not as late as high school. It might also be easy to assume that environmental caring begins with a good curriculum, in essence an environmental-ethics curriculum. I prefer to think that caring takes root in infancy, perhaps even in pregnancy as a mother, and hopefully a father, anticipates caring for the expected baby. It takes root in the anticipatory caring of a caregiver, and in the actual caregiving of another person from birth. And if it begins there it took root in the anticipation of the grandparents for the parents, the great-grandparents for the grandparents, etc. In other words it began longer ago that we can return to. It takes root in physical caregiving accompanied by the psychological caregiving of a nurturing other and develops into self-nurturing and eventually into the ability to nurture another--

-person, animal, plant, natural or human-made object. It develops into a feeling of caring enough about another sharer of our environmental surround to nurture that other. This is where attachment theory can help us out.

Attachment

While attachment theory consists of many threads. It is complicated and often the focus of debate, there are some generally accepted basics namely that every mammal human baby is wired for attachment (Klein, 1995) and requires at least one nurturing caregiver to sustain its early physical and psychological development. With human babies we know that physical care (feeding and cleaning) is not enough; psychological care must also be present and "good enough" for a baby to thrive. This means that the caregiver must be physically and frequently present and must be emotionally connected: gentle in touch and general manner, communicative with eye contact and words, in tune and responsive to a baby's expressions of need and desire. How one actually does these things as a caregiver varies greatly, and is always modified by culture and personality.

While this kind of relationship may be an ideal never again experienced, except at the beginning of a love affair, with human babies we think we have learned that it is a general atmosphere (Stern, 1977) of being "good enough", that is needed, an uninterrupted flow of perfect harmony throughout childhood is neither possible nor desired. There can be occasional bad moments, even bad days between caregiver and child. We also think we have

learned that multiple caregivers, substitute caregivers, male as well as female caregivers, work well with some cautions: they must be "good enough" also, they must spend enough time with the child to become attached and they must not be too many in number.

With this kind of generalized experience a baby experiences what it means to be nurtured, to be cared for; what it is to feel good physically, cherished emotionally. This experience is internalized by the infant and becomes the core of her personality. It becomes the major organizing principle in the human experience. This being cared for is the beginning of what it is to care.

Without this kind of experience with a reliable or receptive caregiver, or with a break in this kind of experience without a good substitute, or with multiple breaks in this kind of experience regardless of the goodness of the substitutes, a developing child is unlikely to grow into a person who is able to love, able to be care-full, full of care. These children are highly likely to develop into a person who feels unlovable, and is unable to love; who is care-less, without care, even destructive of self and of his/her environmental surround filled as it is with people, animals, plants, natural and man-made objects. These children have recently been referred to as "children without conscience" (Magid & McKelvey, 1987). They treat the world as they feel themselves to have been treated and rail against an environment, which they perceive as withholding, in an attempt to exact what they want without being at all sure what they need.

Separation/Individuation

Having experienced good enough attachment, a developing child moves on, well fortified, to the second crucial, but often forgotten, aspect of attachment: separation/individuation or the moving away from a dependency on the caregiver. The ideal of early caregiving, which has been essential, would become stifling should it continue. A developing autonomy or sense of self as an individual, separate from the caregiver is also essential, but requires a sense of loss and mourning of the idealized state just experienced (Klein, 1940/1975; Kavaler-Adler, 1992). This path is not a quick or easy one to follow. It requires, in time, all of human childhood and adolescence and, for many of us, the rest of adulthood as well. Carol Gilligan writes that attachment and separation anchor the cycle of human life both biologically and psychologically (1982, p. 151); Margaret Mahler describes the psychological birth of a human being as well as the physical birth (1975).

Separation/individuation requires, in experience, differentiating the rest of the environment from the caregiver and exploring this environment in larger and larger pieces as well as more and more specifically. It requires moving away and checking back in. It requires feeling zesty and confident as well as feeling scared of the largeness and strangeness of the environment. It requires a sense of loss and mourning of the idealized state of attachment just experienced.

Integration of Attachment and Separation/Individuation

The child who has been supported by one or more caregivers in

experiencing both attachment and separation/individuation develops a sense of personal wholeness and integrity, a sense of what it is to be me and no one else. This child can reconcile the need for both oneness with a caregiver and separation from that caregiver. This child also becomes able to reconcile other opposites: accepting his/her own goodness and badness, and feelings of love and hate; as well as the goodness and badness of others, the love and hate feelings in others including the caregiver (Kaplan, 1987). Each reconciliation requires some sense of loss of preceding modes of organizing the world and the mourning of those losses. This affect is the door both to a full participation in the present and to higher levels of personal and social functioning.

Attachment and separation/individuation depend both on the personality of the child and that of the caregiver/s. Some children are easy attachers, easy separators, some caregivers are easy facilitators of attachment as well as separation/individuation; some children and caregivers have an easy time with one but not the other, some have an easy time with neither. Attachment and separation/individuation depend also on environmental circumstances or stresses which neither player can control completely (problems small and large in the family, in the neighborhood, in the country).

Both attachment and separation/individuation are co-constructed between a child and whichever caregiver is present and are dependent on the "fit" between child and caregiver. The behavior of real life caregivers and children would fall somewhere

on a continuum, not necessarily at an extreme of good "fit" or bad "fit". Many children, perhaps not most, unfortunately, experience good "fit" with their caregiver/s: there is a synchrony between them, there is a flow, the personality of each works for the other. Good enough caregiving presupposes a good "fit" which comes naturally and easily or one which is achieved through hard work on the part of the caregiver. Good "fit" children, who are more likely to receive good care, are more likely to grow up into people who see themselves as good, as worthy of receiving care, as worthy of caregiving. These children develop as people who are care-full, full of care, for their environmental surround.

At the other end of the continuum, many children (growing numbers of children) experience a poor "fit" which may never be improved: a dysynchrony, a perpetual disruption of flow. In these cases the personality of the child annoys the caregiver, and/or the personality of the caregiver leaves the child emotionally hungry, uncomfortable. A poor "fit" evidences neglect (wherein the caregiver gives up on the child as worthy of care and on his/her self as a worthy caregiver); or it evidences abuse (wherein the caregiver attacks the child as his/her own "bad" self externalized in the child). Poor "fit" children are more likely to receive poor care and are more likely to grow into people whose loving emotions are split off, who act out rage through destruction. These children may develop as people who are care-less, without care for their environmental surround.

In between on the continuum are those children who receive

barely adequate caregiving within a barely adequate "fit" with caregivers who are barely present physically and/or who are barely present emotionally; caregivers who are rather casual in their caregiving, only partially connected. Barely adequate "fit" children are more likely to split off their emotions and to either withdrawal from the felt need for either care-receiving or care-giving or they may involve themselves in both care-receiving and care-giving but in a compulsive manner with little or no feeling involved. They may avoid intimate relationships with their environmental surround, becoming physical or psychological loners, or they may receive what care is offered without ever feeling particularly good and "do the right thing" in giving care without ever being emotionally involved with the recipient of that care.

Children who receive <u>good enough</u> care in a good "fit" relationship with their caregiver/s are the children who are primed and ready for the environmental "teaching" which we can offer at home and in our schools. These are the children who will be most able to integrate their emotional and intellectual selves and develop into people who really care about their environmental surround.

Children who receive <u>barely adequate</u> care within a barely adequate "fit" relationship with their caregiver/s may be somewhat ready for the environmental "teaching" which we can offer at home and in our schools. These children are likely to learn "the right thing" or the just thing and do it, but compulsively and without emotion. They may be interested in the rules, and follow them.

They may understand environmental needs and may act on them, but they won't be touched emotionally. It is also possible that these children will be indifferent to their environment and to in our environmental teaching and will withdrawal from environmental caring but without being destructive. They will be ecologically neutral. At best, we may be able to reach them intellectually with a spectacular curriculum, but rarely will we reach them emotionally.

Children who receive poor care within a poor "fit" relationship are the most likely to remain untouched by whatever we offer in the way of environmental teaching at home and in our schools. Their rage, over not having gotten what they needed when they needed it, will make it impossible for them to connect with teachers as it was impossible for them to connect with parents. They will pull for caregiving from others but abuse it when it is offered. They will be unlikely to conceptualize or feel themselves as care-givers. Their rage will prevent care-full behavior. They may act "as if" our environmental teaching is interesting or impactful, but the goal is to protect themselves from further harm and, hopefully, to get what they need. To accomplish this, they may turn to deception covered by charm, to blatant deception, to destruction.

In the extreme, these are the children who kill or torture animals repeatedly. They have even been known to purposely kill other children "to see how long it takes them to die" (Magid and McKelvey, 1987), the result of rage and curiosity without care;

these are the children who killed the two-year-old in England a couple of years ago. These are the adolescents who put a live fish in a microwave in Florida "to see what would happen"; the same adolescents who put a puppy in a bag and blew in marijuana "to see what a puppy was like when it got high". These are the adults in New Jersey to applied to adopt a Dalmatian from an aging farm couple and tortured it, cutting off its ears, its tail, cutting open its stomach while it was still alive. These are the adult policemen in New York who answered a call to pick up a found Shit-tzu dog and took it to a field for gun practice. These are the adults who bomb a building in peacetime which they know to be filled with working adults and little children.

These are the children for whom environmental education will fall on deaf ears/deaf hearts despite our best efforts. These are the children who have been damaged, perhaps beyond repair by what came before in their lives, before we ever meet them as teachers.

Table 1: An Attachment---Separation/Individuation Continuum

THE CARE-GIVER		
Good Enough Caregiving Good "fit"	Barely Adequate Caregiving Barely Adequate "fit"	Poor Caregiving Poor "fit"
THE CARE-RECEIVER		
Good self Worthy of care-receiving Worthy of care-giving Care-full	Not-so-good self Emotions split off Possible Options: 1-Withdrawal from care-receiving care-giving 2-Compulsive care-receiving	Bad Self Loving Emotions split off Rage acted out Pulls for care-receiving (care bandit) No real care-giving

care-giving	**Destructive to envi-**
3-Sporadic/	**ronmental surround**
minimal caregiving	**Care-less**

Throughout the world well-nurtured children are becoming concerned about, and often actively involved in caring for the people. animals, plants, natural and human-made objects with which they interact in their environment. Schools are taking an increasing role in teaching an ethic of caring, in encouraging all children, however nurtured, to investigate, plan for, monitor, and manage the environments of their own communities (Hart, 1994), to be care-full. The teaching strategies utilized in environmental education assume that children can develop an environmental ethic, or earth stewardship, but often ignore the developmental route which children move through toward an ever more mature ethic of caring.

Table 2: Teaching an Ethic of Caring

THE STUDENT	
Good enough nurturing	**Poor nurturing**
THE TEACHING	
An ethic of caring	**A non-caring value system**
Good enough modeling	**No/poor modeling**
Good enough teaching	**No/Poor teaching**
THE STUDENT	
Care-full **Conscientious**	**Care-less** **Conscienceless**

The work of Carol Gilligan (1982, 1988) and others (Ward and

Tayler, 1988; Larrabee, 1993; Lyons. 1983; Thompson, 1992, 1994; Tronto, 1993; Wiggens, 1988 to name a few) is particularly relevant to environmental caring. These theorists recognize and call attention to the fact that many theorists have defined the female personality using male personality as the norm.

It became clear to Gilligan (1982) that women's development was located in their experience of relationships, that feminine personality defines itself in relation to, and in connection with, other people more than masculine personality does. Women define themselves in a context of human relationship and judge themselves "in terms of their ability to care" (p. 17) which determined their construction of moral problems.

> ...the standard of moral judgment that informs their (women's) assessment of self is a standard of relationship, an ethic of nurturance, responsibility, and care. Measuring their strength in the activity of attachment ('giving to', 'helping out', 'being kind', 'not hurting')...(p. 159).

Gilligan found that "in all of women's descriptions, identity is defined in a context of relationship and judged by a standard of responsibility and care". She continues, "...morality is seen by these women as arising from the experience of connection and conceived as a problem of inclusion rather than one of balancing claims" (p. 160), the underlying assumption being that morality stems from attachment.

Joan Tronto (1993) adds that an ethic of care cannot be applied equally to all situations. People do not care for everyone and everything equally; "it is easy to imagine that there will be some people or concerns about which we do not care", but does lack

of care "free us from moral responsibility"? (p. 249). An ethic of care must also be "situated in the context of existing political and social theory", and may constitute a view of self, relationships, and social order that is incompatible with an emphasis on individual rights (p. 251). She would assert that an ethic of caring is a "set of sensibilities which every morally mature person should develop, alongside the sensibilities of justice morality" (p. 252) which implies that caring can be taught in families and schools and that male and female have equal potential to develop both.

Nona Lyons (1983) and Patricia Thompson (1992, 1994) attempt to remove an ethic of care from gender division. Lyons defines two modes of describing self in relation to others: separate/ objective and connected. In making moral decisions separate/ objective individuals, of either gender, "tend to use a morality of justice" while connected individuals, of either gender, tend to use "a morality of care". Each construction has strengths and weaknesses. Equality is an ideal and the strength of a morality of justice; consideration of an individual's particular needs is an ideal and the strength of a morality of care. Impartial concern for other's rights may not be sufficient to provide for care, however, and caring for others may be overly emotional and even unfair (p. 135).

Thompson (1992, 1994) describes, not only a different voice but also a different location as generating two modes of conceptualizing self in relation to others in two systems of human

action. She identifies the Hestian and Hermean perspectives which are not divided on the basis of gender. The Hestian system focuses on the private domestic domain and operates according to an ideology of connection, on an ethic of caring, and on intrinsic rewards. The Hermean system focuses on the public civic domain and operates on an ideology of control, on an ethic of justice, and on extrinsic rewards.

A caring ecological relationship is dynamic, able to be affected by the internal environment of the person and by the people/animal/plant/object external environmental surround in which a person lives.

I would like to conclude with this third aspect of an ecological relationship, using it to move toward at least a temporary integration of the influence of attachment on the development of a caring relationship with our environment.

The notion that a caring ecological relationship is dynamic implies that it is an open system influenced all along the way by our internal and external environments. Our internal and external environments are complex and not completely understood. They consist of the interaction of biological levels (molecular, physiological, individual, group/population) with the multiple social and psychological influences over time of the people, animals, plants, and natural and human-made objects that surround us. Our internal and external environments, in all of their complexities, affect each other and, of course, us. Interwoven through these are those two influences which we have rather glibly

called "nature" and "nurture" which cannot wisely be separated as explanations for human behavior. So we are dealing with people who are dynamic organisms who are in some kind of dynamic relationship with their dynamic environments. All of this dynamism makes for remarkable complexity which we try to organize and order; this paper being yet another example of this effort.

So, back to the specific questions raised in this paper: How did we, who care about the environment, ourselves, develop our current level of caring (however advanced it may be)? How do children become caring? Can we facilitate the development of caring in children...the development of care-full children...of children who are, and continue to develop, as people "full of care" rather than as people "without care" for their environmental surround, be it people, animal, plant, or natural or human-made object?

In attempting to answer these questions we must recognize that we are groping with complexity in both question and answer. Attachment theories and morality theories can each offer insight but must move toward further integration within the theories themselves and between the theories. It seems apparent that the experience of early and continued attachment relationships affect the development of both an ethic of care and must precede any effort at teaching. Recent research on infancy provides compelling indication that the foundations of morality are present early in child development (Gilligan, 1988; Kagan, 1984; Stern, 1985) both in an infant's responsiveness to the feelings and care of others

and in the young child's appreciation of standards (Gilligan, 1988, p. 114). It also seems apparent that an ethic of caring involves both the cognitive and emotional aspects of environmental stewardship and that, as such, both are worthy characteristics in all people regardless of gender, worthy goals to facilitate in all people. It remains for developmental theorists, educators, and parents to integrate their thinking and action so that we can continue to move forward in conceptualizing and facilitating the development of people who are care-full rather than care-less of the environmental surround which we share.

We all have within us the potential for anger, rage, aggression which can be directed toward any part of our environment: people, animals, plants, objects. This potential is mellowed out in most of us by two kinds of experience: good nurturing and the teaching of an ethic of care by our caregivers and our cultural group. Even, however, with these two kinds of experience our potential for anger, rage, and aggression can be tapped into if the environment becomes threatening enough or, perhaps, seductive enough. Our violent potential can be exposed and called to action. There is no guarantee that early caring feelings can be maintained in an individual, but, the best and perhaps only hope of it developing is first good nurturing, second good nurturing, third good nurturing and, only fourth good teaching.

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